UNITED
NATIONS

DP

Governing Council
of the
United Nations
Development Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

DP/1991/SR.19
10 June 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GOVERNING COUNCIL

Thirty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 6 June 1991, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. PIRIZ-BALLON (Uruguay)

CONTENTS

Other funds and programmes (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Department of Conference Services, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

OTHER FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES (continued)

United Nations Development Fund for Women (continued) (DP/1991/46)

1. Mr. LIN Lian Ke (China) said that women's participation in economic activities enhanced their social status and promoted the economic and social development of the country as a whole. Accordingly, organizations of the United Nations system, when setting their priorities, should seek to combine other considerations with the advancement of women. UNIFEM had played an active role in providing Asia, Africa and Latin America with small-scale projects that benefited women directly, for example in the food-processing sector. As such activities increased women's levels of employment and income, UNIFEM had contributed to improving the social status of women in developing countries. His Government had always supported UNIFEM and would continue to do so.

2. Ms. HELLSTROM (Sweden), speaking also on behalf of Denmark, Finland and Norway, said that UNIFEM was unique in that it was experimental and catalytic, tested new approaches and was an advocate for women. It provided models on how to integrate women into mainstream development that were useful to the entire United Nations development cooperation system. She welcomed the work done by UNIFEM in setting long-term and short-term priorities and thought that the two areas on which UNIFEM had chosen to concentrate, namely food security and trade and industry, were very relevant to women. Since those topics also fell under the mandate of other United Nations organizations, she was interested in knowing how UNIFEM cooperated with the rest of the United Nations system in enhancing women's economic and social development.

3. Through the efforts of UNIFEM and others, the gender issue had been put on the agenda of most development agencies. She noted with interest UNIFEM's recent efforts to improve the quality of programming and would like to see the process continue; in particular, UNIFEM's capacity to document and disseminate the results of its experimental and catalytic approaches should be strengthened.

4. Mr. FONDI (Italy) said that his delegation was pleased to confirm that Italy had again in 1991 pledged a substantial contribution to UNIFEM, being firmly convinced of the importance of its activities, which were rightly aimed at maximizing the catalytic impact of women's involvement in development. He agreed that food security and trade and industry were the proper priorities for UNIFEM and welcomed its great attention to environmental aspects. Lastly, he welcomed the reorganization of UNIFEM, in particular the devolution of responsibility and the technical improvements in administration.

5. Ms. POLLACK (United States of America) expressed her Government's support for UNIFEM's work. Although her delegation believed that gender issues should

(Ms. Pollack, United States)

ideally be integrated into the United Nations development system, and looked forward to the day when there would no longer be a need for a separate fund for women, it supported the very important work being done by UNIFEM.

6. The United States believed that increasing women's access to and production of modern technologies could significantly benefit women. Ways and means of using new and advanced technologies, as well as scientific research, to benefit women should be a focus of the 1995 world conference on women, to which UNIFEM could undoubtedly contribute much.

7. While her delegation supported UNIFEM's experimental and catalytic approach, a reliable system must be in place for deciding which experimental and catalytic projects were valuable and, as Canada had also pointed out, for disseminating the findings. The report was insufficiently clear as to the criteria used by UNIFEM for the selection of projects.

8. The United States commended UNIFEM for its organizational management initiatives, specifically its computerized budget management system, and for its implementation of the Performance Appraisal Review, and applauded UNIFEM's successful efforts to increase its sources of funding. Management of programme resources had been so able that staff growth had been zero for two bienniums.

9. Lastly, with respect to budgets, her delegation wished to know the breakdown between outstanding recommended project approvals and unspent allocations from previous years.

10. Mr. TWITE (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom preferred to make its voluntary contributions to core resources rather than to trust funds, but that it made an exception for UNIFEM because of the great importance of its work. His delegation considered that UNIFEM should concentrate primarily on its catalytic role, to increase awareness of the real needs of women, and should not become involved at the small project level. Project work properly belonged to UNDP and the executing agencies, and there was a danger that UNIFEM's comparatively limited resources would be dissipated. Involvement in project implementation might even marginalize women's issues, achieving the very opposite of UNIFEM's aim.

11. His delegation, like that of Germany, was concerned that the Administrator's report did not attempt the admittedly difficult task of measuring the success rate of the catalytic work undertaken by UNIFEM. It would like to see that attempt made.

12. Mr. TANTOT (France), referring to the planned reform of senior management at UNDP, said that the idea that UNIFEM should report to the Bureau for Programme Policy and Evaluation had at first seemed logical to his delegation, as that office was central to decision-making and could help integrate women's issues into development activities. On reflection, however, it had decided

(Mr. Tantot, France)

that the approach was premature. Since women's participation in economic life had by no means reached its full measure, France considered that UNIFEM should retain its separate identity and role, in which it had been so successful.

13. Ms. CORVALAN (Observer for Chile) took note of UNIFEM's goal of achieving participation, sustainability and capacity-building, and welcomed the Fund's effort to tear down the walls that had confined women in poverty. The mandate of UNIFEM, to be experimental and catalytic, to test new approaches, and to be an advocate for women, did require a definite capacity to document the process and product of project experience and to disseminate the findings. The creation of national UNIFEM committees was of great interest to Chile.

14. She described briefly the situation of women in Chile, where approximately one in three births was illegitimate, or three out of five in the case of mothers under 20 years old. About 150,000 abortions were performed each year, mortality from abortions accounting for a third of maternal mortality as a whole. Women made up 30 per cent of the workforce, but were discriminated against: a man made more than a woman for the same work. A fifth of all households were headed by women, and 69,000 such households had been living in extreme poverty in 1988.

15. The new Government was giving priority to women's issues and had created a ministerial-level National Women's Service, whose job it was to coordinate, plan and propose policies and programmes to promote women's full equality and participation in all areas of national life and to ensure the elimination of all discrimination. Chile was the first country in Latin America to set up governmental machinery for women at the ministerial level, thereby implementing paragraph 57 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.

16. Her delegation shared UNIFEM's concern at the relationship between poverty, environment and women's issues and, accordingly, would like the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development to focus on the impact of environmental degradation on millions of poor women and on the important role that women could play in maintaining ecological balance.

17. Mr. TALADRID (Cuba) said that UNIFEM's projects in Cuba, though small, were considered most useful. His delegation believed that the problem of women's access to work could not be solved through credits and banking arrangements alone. In the third world, and particularly in Latin America, there were acute problems that denied women full participation in the workforce.

18. With respect to UNIFEM's priorities, he agreed that food security was important, but believed that without education and health measures and support for women's right to work, there could be no prospects for significant improvement.

(Mr. Taladrid, Cuba)

19. His delegation concurred with the view of the representative of France that the separate organizational identity of UNIFEM should be maintained.

20. Ms. CAPELING-ALAKIJA (Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women), replying to questions raised by members of the Council, said that UNIFEM approved projects on the basis of a number of criteria. In general, projects should catalyse larger systems to do more for women. Since the Fund was a small organization, one of its major tasks was to encourage other parts of the United Nations system, bilateral and multilateral donors and non-governmental organizations to direct funds towards women. While UNIFEM worked directly with women in developing countries at the grass-roots level, it also sought to establish linkages with policy- and decision-making bodies in those countries. It was necessary to influence general policy-making in order to change the overall environment in which women worked. Women had to understand that policies shaped their lives and policy makers had to see how their decisions affected women. Unless women at the grass-roots level became organized and gained experience and knowledge, the issue of women in development would always be donor-driven. Leadership training, therefore, was essential so that women could negotiate on their own behalf.

21. It was important to ensure that projects addressed women's practical needs and were designed to improve their social and economic status. There must be a local capacity to execute projects. UNIFEM approved projects that related to areas within its terms of reference, such as agriculture, food security, trade and industry and national planning. In view of its limited resources, the Fund focused its projects on those areas to ensure maximum impact and also sought to catalyse other parts of the United Nations system in areas such as health care and education, which did not fall directly within its mandate.

22. The Fund participated with United Nations sister organizations through the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) Women in Development Expert Group, which provided access to the women in development (WID) units of funding agencies within the United Nations system. UNIFEM also participated in the inter-agency meetings held annually at Vienna in connection with the Commission on the Status of Women. That made it possible to build alliances and develop strategies for working with the agencies concerned. UNIFEM cooperated with UNIDO, ILO, WFP, FAO, IFAD and the International Trade Centre (ITC) in formulating strategies to bring the issue of women in development to the higher policy-making levels in those agencies.

23. Since it worked with women at the grass-roots level, the Fund could assist those agencies in building linkages at the policy level and ensuring that their programmes actually reached women. There were a number of initiatives in which UNIFEM was working with Governments on a bilateral basis through the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADDC). Canada was funding a strategy for incorporating WID into technical ministries and the SADDC secretariat in order to promote gender sensitivity. The

(Ms. Capeling-Alakija)

Government of Australia was supporting a number of initiatives in the Pacific region and the Netherlands was providing support for activities in Africa and the Women in Environment and Development Programme. UNIFEM had also gained the support of OECD and inter-agency WID expert groups for spearheading a strategy to enhance donor coordination in support of national machinery for women. The Fund was planning a three-year activity beginning in 1992 to determine what could be done when donors coordinated their efforts with national machinery.

24. UNIFEM had redeployed staff in order to enhance its monitoring and evaluation capability and was working with UNDP to incorporate its evaluation experience into the Programme's database system. The Fund also regularly published a report which provided information on the results of its monitoring and evaluation activities. Having acquired the necessary technology and redeployed staff, the Fund now required further staff resources in order to expand its evaluation capability.

25. The large balance in the UNIFEM account was a matter of concern. Delivery was a high priority and effectiveness was considered to be as important as efficiency of delivery. In that connection, it was absolutely essential to ensure that resources were reaching women in developing countries or were catalysing the funds of larger agencies to enable them to assist a greater number of women. Priority would still be given to reducing the balance. Although it would remain at about the same level in 1991 since UNIFEM was delivering what it was raising, it was hoped that by 1992 the balance would begin to diminish.

26. Lastly, with regard to the question of outreach and mobilization of funds, she felt that UNIFEM was in a unique position to attract additional support to the United Nations system. The Fund had access to a very special constituency, made up of the growing number of women in industrialized countries who were working in corporations and small businesses in the private sector. Those women understood the need for access to training, credit, and labour- and time-saving technologies in developing countries. That was an important constituency for supporting international development efforts. Many contributions were being provided by foundations and women's professional organizations. It was hoped that those women would encourage Governments to increase official development assistance, which seemed to be decreasing in the 1990s.

27. The PRESIDENT said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed that the Drafting Group should prepare a draft decision on the agenda item under consideration.

28. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.